

SHAOLIN TRINITY

SHAOLIN MONK SHI DEJIAN DISCUSSES THE THREE TREASURES

By Gene Ching (Xinglong)

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Shaolin training in America is incomplete. Most go no further than kung fu, but there's far more to Shaolin than the martial arts. Zen, or Chan in Mandarin, was founded at Shaolin, so that's an important facet of the tradition. Although many westerners prefer martial arts to be non-denominational, or at least not an eastern denomination, most serious Shaolin students will pursue Chan too. Then there's the



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- yi . Yi means the third
aolin culture, but
has been
erlooked.

e have three

u, wu (martial arts), and yi," recounts Shaolin Monk Shi Dejian in
ian is one of today's most respected grandmasters of Shaolin.
right front courtyard of the temple itself, a serene bamboo grove
that was once open to the public but is now private access only.
at location, but Dejian is seldom there. He prefers to spend his
on in the many small hidden temples on Song Mountain. A true
nk, Dejian tends to be reclusive, but he's very forthright when it
ussing the importance of Shaolin medicine. According to Dejian,
es the mind. Wu strengthens the body. Yi helps the world. These
be separated. If you realize the theory of Chan, you can make
ur medicine and reach the summit. If you can make these two
ur kung fu will increase. At Shaolin, we say san bao hui yi (three
one . According to the rules of Shaolin, all three aspects must
ltaneously. Some just specialize in one - this is imperfect."

from Black Dragon River

s born to a poor family of farmers in China's northernmost
ongjiang. Heilongjian borders Mongolia and the former Soviet

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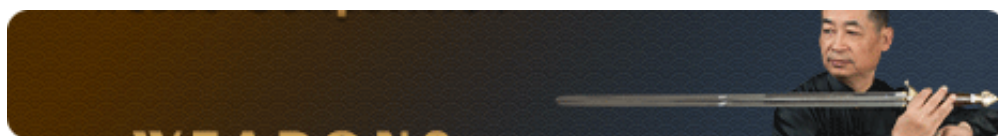


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ital city, Harbin, is internationally recognized for an annual Ice Festival where enormous ice sculptures are carved during -40 C. In 1944, Dejian started training in kung fu from two local masters to stay fit. Recognizing his potential, one of his masters took him to Shaolin. "If you want to be a good master, you must go to Shaolin to study," Shaolin became Dejian's quest, but he worried about his son. Not only does monastic life mean relinquishing family, a poor man in his son as a farmhand. When he finally revealed his son, the father agreed, but didn't release him until he promised to study medicine. Dejian was too poor to afford health care.

When a 17-year-old Dejian arrived at Shaolin. A star pupil, he was taught by three prominent teachers, each a Shaolin disciple and a leading master of his generation. He studied under Grandmaster Yang and Grandmaster Chou Huibao, but the bulk of his Shaolin kung fu were learned from Grandmaster Zhang Qinghe. Zhang was very good at the transmission of Shaolin medicine. He told Dejian, "Shaolin medicine is an integral part of Shaolin culture. It has a lot to do with kung fu, and health. You must pay the utmost attention to study medicine within the temple." Dejian would focus on medicine for over a decade. In 1961, he became a disciple of Venerable Shaolin Monk Shi Suxi; two years later, he took his vows as a full-fledged Buddhist monk of the Shaolin



monks. As masters of the meditator, they progress towards the attainment of enlightenment. In Thailand, the art of Thai massage is believed to be a direct descendant of the therapeutic teaching of Jivaka, Buddha's doctor. Just as Buddhist monks make devotional bows before bouts, Thai masseurs give offerings to Jivaka as part of their sessions. Dejian attributes the tradition of Thai massage to Shaolin's patriarch Bodhidharma.

Shaolin medicine is from Tamo (Bodhidharma)," states Dejian. When the monks were weak after meditation, he began collecting herbs to help his followers. It is the cream of folk medicine. These herbs were developed across successive dynasties, peaking in the Ming (1368-1644 CE). It was during the Ming that Shaolin monks fought off pirates in Fujian, so the need for good medicine arose. It was also then Shaolin Abbot Dao Guang established a huge apothecary at Shaolin. Disciples, believers, followers and the poor. This merit has been passed on from that time on - from Abbot Dao Guang."

Shaolin's traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is grasped by very few. In 1994, Shaolin's honorary Abbot who passed away in 1994, had a deep understanding. Another great Shaolin medical practitioner was Grandmaster Both grandmasters passed their skills to Zhang Qinghe. Zhang's Chan master. His kung fu and medicine was from Chuan Shaolin. These masters are all well recognized in Chinese martial

Wu was talented at both acupuncture and qigong. He



a traditional Shaolin art of Xinyiba (heart mind) to me. Xinyiba was popularized by Shi Degen, another disciple of Wu Sanlin. But we keep it as a teaching secret. We keep it mysterious. We do not demonstrate it for our master. Grandmaster Zhang never showed it to the public. It cannot be described in words. It is the supreme cream of Shaolin.

Shaolin Healing

Shaolin healing can be therapeutic in itself. Accordingly, a skilled TCM doctor must begin from a healthy place, just like the biblical proverb, "Be faithful to yourself" (Luke 4:23). According to Dejian, Shaolin self-healing begins with quieting your mind, adjusting your body and controlling your emotions. The description begins with Shaolin qigong, specifically the two methods of the Marrow-Washing Classic or Yijinjing and the Muscle-Tendon Change Classic or Xisuijing. "Yijinjing changes the meridians of your body," asserts Dejian. "Xisuijing improves your circulation, fosters qi, makes you strong and adjusts your body physically and psychologically. Without the centuries of practice and wisdom (of these teachings) you cannot reach the spirit of this. It is useless to learn it and then practice for only a few months. Everyone can practice it. Everyone can feel it. Everybody has the merit of Buddha. If enlightened, you become the Buddha. If not enlightened, you're an ordinary person. You can use qi to heal."

Controlling your diet is an important element of healthy living. Buddhism stressed vegetarianism. "Vegetarianism improves your health," states Dejian. "The Shaolin vegetarian diet includes grains and vegetables without spices. We eat fruits but nothing too spicy. No ginger or garlic. Monks do not eat anything from animals, garlic, ginger, or onions - nothing spicy or odiferous. We don't eat eggs but can use milk." Vegetarianism amongst Shaolin monks has been a hotly disputed topic in martial circles since many Shaolin warrior monks are not completely vegetarian. This is because warrior monks are of a special class, an allowance of Shaolin's martial legacy; they do not take all the vows of a typical Buddhist monk. The fully-indoctrinated monks of Shaolin practice vegetarianism.

The Land of Trial

The landscape of Shaolin has changed radically over Dejian's near-quarter-century watch. Ever since Dejian's arrival, Shaolin has been going global. It's been a challenging transition as this medieval monastery struggles to bring its 1500-year-legacy to heal today's wounded world. Dejian reflects upon his calling wistfully. "The first ten years (of my refuge at Shaolin) and what followed have been very different. As a monk of Shaolin, I have no family responsibility. My only responsibility is to research and inherit the Shaolin arts. I put all my effort into this. In my whole life, I know I can only get a little. Shaolin is a land of trial."

The burden of his master's legacy would weigh heavily on any man, but for Dejian, it's a mission of mercy and medicine. "Shaolin's medicinal history and methods do not contradict TCM, but we have many special methodologies for treatment. It's the cream of medicine. Shaolin medicine is Buddha's medicine. It must be brought out so everyone can know it and understand it. Some cancer patients who gave up on clinical treatments have come to Shaolin; most have recovered. Grandmaster Zhang propounded a very special

treatment - the qiao (gates treatment. There are seven qiao, the eyes, ears and so on. We use specially-formulated powders, pills and plasters to cure illnesses. These external treatments help to adjust the internal flow of the body. Grandmaster Zhang wished that Shaolin medicine would be popularized to benefit all the people of the world. Due to recent events, Shaolin medicine is encountering a big crisis. It has not been publicized. Anyone interested in promoting Shaolin medicine should pursue it here. This medicine does not belong to Shaolin or TCM. It belongs to the world."

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The author gratefully acknowledges Wang Yu Min of China International Travel Services (C.I.T.S) for his assistance with this interview. For more information about travel and study in China, visit the C.I.T.S. website at

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